

Congressman

# Ben Cardin Reports From Washington

SPRING 2004

THIRD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, MARYLAND

*Dear Friends,*

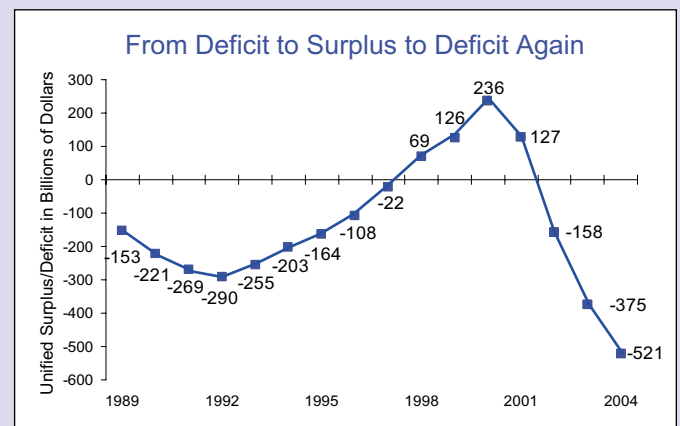
Our country is facing serious budgetary problems that could jeopardize our future. Congress currently is considering the FY 2005 budget, which projects a \$521 billion deficit and calls for making \$1.1 trillion in tax cuts permanent.

Economists warn that chronic deficits of this magnitude threaten our economy by crowding out private investment, driving up interest rates and slowing economic growth. We also have a \$7 trillion national debt, which would grow by an additional \$2.4 trillion in 10 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Now is the time to take care of Americans and build for the future. We need to make sure veterans have the benefits they were promised, we need to ensure teachers have the resources to educate our children and we need to give our seniors the health care they deserve. We also need to reduce escalating health care costs, particularly the cost of prescription drugs.

This newsletter highlights national priorities that are important to our country. I also have listed a number of Town Hall meetings and events on the back page. I hope to see you.

Sincerely,



This chart is based on Office of Management and Budget figures. It shows that over the last 15 years our country has been on a roller coaster ride from deficit spending to a surplus and back again to a deep deficit.

*E-News Updates...*

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# A Look At... OUR NATIONAL PRIORITIES

## Taking Care of Veterans

Our military is the finest in the world. Today, more than 114,000 U.S. soldiers are serving in Iraq and more than 11,000 in Afghanistan. Many of these soldiers are members of the National Guard and Army Reserve, including almost 2,700 from Maryland. Yet, these brave men and women do not have permanent access to health care benefits.

Last year, Congress approved legislation to provide members of the Reserves and National Guard and their families with only one year of access to the military's TRICARE health system. These soldiers and their families deserve full access to the military health care system. I support legislation that would provide all National Guard and Reserve members and their families access to TRICARE, regardless of their mobilization status.

Our budgetary problems also are taking a heavy toll on the veterans health care system. The President's budget calls for raising health care costs

for more than one million veterans, increasing drug co-payments and imposing new enrollment fees that will cost veterans more than \$2 billion over five years.

While the VA health care system struggles to keep pace with the need, this year's budget does not provide adequate funding. Today, some 30,000 veterans must wait six months or longer for an appointment at a VA hospital. Unfortunately, this year's proposed budget includes an increase of less than 2% for veterans health care -- not enough to maintain even current levels of service.

On a positive note, last year Congress passed my legislation to help military retirees who are Medicare-eligible access the TRICARE health system without paying a penalty for failing to enroll in Medicare Part B when first eligible. ***Military retirees and their spouses who sign up for Medicare Part B between Jan. 1, 2001 and Dec. 31, 2004 will be exempt from the late enrollment fee effective Jan. 1, 2004. For further information contact 1-800-MEDICARE.***

## Fixing The Medicare Drug Benefit

Last December, President Bush signed into law legislation to provide Medicare beneficiaries with the opportunity to purchase drug coverage through private health insurance plans. That provision of the law will not take effect until 2006, which gives Congress time to repair the serious structural flaws in the new law.

I have introduced the ***Preserving Medicare for All Act***, HR3702, to address the law's most serious defects. My legislation would:

- Lower the cost of prescription drugs by allowing the federal government to negotiate lower prices with drug manufacturers;

- Provide a guaranteed, universally available drug option within Medicare;

- Appropriately reimburse employer retiree health care plans so that retirees can maintain their prescription drug coverage;

- Eliminate excess payments to private managed care plans; and

- Repeal the "expenditure cap" that will result in harsh cuts to Medicare patients and providers.

It is important that we provide seniors with a real choice of a private-sector option or a nationally-available, defined benefit prescription drug program within Medicare. Under my bill, seniors would have the option of choosing a Medicare-based prescription plan where premiums, deductibles, copays and cost limits would be set by law, not subject to change by private insurance companies.

I share the concerns of hundreds of Maryland seniors who have said they are worried about the new law and what it will ultimately mean for the Medicare program. I am committed to restructuring the law before it takes effect in 2006.

## Helping Our Teachers

Two years ago, Congress passed President Bush's initiative ***No Child Left Behind Act*** (NCLBA). The legislation's goal was a lofty one: to increase student achievement and upgrade teacher qualifications. Unfortunately, funding has not been adequate

to achieve these goals. Last year, the NCLBA was underfunded by about \$9 billion, making it impossible to fully implement the legislation.

I recently introduced legislation to tackle the problem of under performing schools. My bill would establish a group of "certified" Master Teachers with extensive experience and training who are willing to teach in schools that are not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by the ***No Child Left Behind Act***. In exchange for a commitment to teach for four years in an under performing school, these teachers would be exempt from paying federal taxes on 25% of their income for those four years.

Too many of our nation's schools are failing to meet performance standards. As currently designated by the NCLBA, 100% of our nation's students must meet the AYP standards in reading, math, and science by the 2013-2014 school year. At this time, 36.6% of all Maryland schools are not meeting this standard. Our future depends on providing our teachers and children with the resources they need to succeed.



Rep. Cardin addressed veterans about the need to keep our promises to the men and women who served in the military at a Town Hall meeting at VFW Harry L. Cooper Post #160 in Glen Burnie.



At the Parkville Senior Center, Rep. Cardin unveils legislation to fix the structural flaws in the recently enacted Medicare bill before the prescription drug provisions take effect in 2006.

# Meet Your Congressman

## Budget Deficit Town Hall Meetings

- Wednesday, May 5 at 7 p.m.  
Mt. Washington Conference Center  
5801 Smith Ave.  
*Special Guest: Robert Greenstein,  
Executive Dir., Center on Budget &  
Policy Priorities*
- Thursday, May 6 at 7 p.m.  
Crofton Library  
1681 Riedel Rd.  
*Special Guest: Corey Davison, Dir. of  
Legislative Affairs, Concord Coalition*

## ART LOVERS

You are invited to find out  
this year's winner of the  
3rd Congressional District's  
high school

## CONGRESSIONAL ART COMPETITION

- Date: Wednesday, April 28  
at 6:30 p.m.
- Location: Tide Point  
Promenade,  
1040 Hull St., Locust Point  
(The winner's art work will  
be displayed for one year in  
the U.S. Capital walkway).

## Medicare Drug Benefit Town Hall Meetings

- Monday, May 3 at 1 p.m.  
Annapolis Senior Center  
1027 Bay Ridge Ave.,  
Annapolis
- Monday, May 3 at 7 p.m.  
Morrell Park Elementary/  
Middle School  
2601 Tolley St., Baltimore City
- Tuesday, May 11 at 1 p.m.  
Pikesville Senior Center  
1301 Reisterstown Rd.

## Resources For Teachers with Towson University College of Education

- Monday, May 10 at 7 p.m.  
Towson University  
Unitas Stadium, Minnegan Room

## Rep. Cardin's...

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